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PLACE NAMES IN THE CLASSROOM.

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ALTHOUGH "PLACE-NAMING" IS A BASIC HUMAN FUNCTION, THE STUDY OF THE ORIGIN OF PROPER NAMES OF PERSONS AND PLACES (ONOMASTICS) HAS BEEN LARGELY IGNORED BY AMERICAN PHILOLOGISTS AND TEACHERS OF ENGLISH. DESPITE A PAUCITY OF RESEARCH, HOWEVER, ANY ENGLISH TEACHER WHO WANTS TO INTEREST STUDENTS IN ONOMASTIC INVESTIGATION CAN EXPLOIT THE GREAT BODY OF LOCAL PLACE NAMES. THIS STUDY OF PROPER NAMES IN THE CLASSROOM CAN GIVE STUDENTS (1) A CURIOSITY ABOUT NAMES OF PERSONS AND PLACES, (2) THE PLEASURE EVOKED BY THE DISCOVERY OF THE WHIMSICAL PROCESSES INVOLVED IN NAMING PLACES, (3) A TECHNIQUE BY WHICH TO OVERCOME LIMITED RESOURCES THROUGH INTERVIEWS WITH LOCAL HISTORIANS AND SEARCHES OF PRIMARY DOCUMENTS IN VILLAGE RECORDS AND COLLEGE LIBRARIES, (4) EXPERIENCE IN INTEGRATING SEVERAL DISCIPLINES SUCH AS HISTORY, GEOGRAPHY, LINGUISTICS, SOCIOLOGY ANTHROPOLOGY, AND FOREIGN LANGUAGES, (5) INFORMATION ON HOW LANGUAGE CHANGES AND ON HOW PLACE NAMES BECOME IMPORTANT IN HISTORICAL POLITICAL CONTEXTS, (6) AN OPPORTUNITY TO DISCOVER THE COLORFUL HISTORY OF THEIR OWN COMMUNITY AND TO ELIMINATE LOCAL FICTIONS, AND (7) A MEANS OF CONTRIBUTING TO GROWING SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH IN THE FIELD OF ONOMASTICS. (A BIBLIOGRAPHY OF BOOKS AND ARTICLES IN THE AREA OF NAME STUDY IS INCLUDED.) THIS PAPER WAS PRESENTED AT THE 1967 NCTE ANNUAL CONVENTION. (JB)

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Place Names in the Classroom

In an area of New York's North Country which contains the villages of Madrid, Potsdam, Bombay, Lisbon, Stockholm, and Canton, a student can hardly avoid being curious about the pattern of names. Whether he reads or not, he certainly has heard or observed that these names occur elsewhere and that the cities that carry them appear to be somewhat larger, possibly more important, than the rather provincial villages in his community. Yet, when a group of elementary school teachers were asked if they had ever discussed these and other place names with their students, they admitted that they had not but that students might get interested in them.

Merely bringing the matter to their attention stimulated the teachers. They were soon animatedly arguing whether Potsdam was named after the European city or whether it was named for Mr. Potts, who may or may not have operated a gristmill on the Raquette River at the site of what is now the village of Potsdam. The latter supposition is a colorful piece of onomastic folk etymology; however, it indicated that the teachers knew little about the important names around them and, more surprising, little about local history. Although many teachers on the first grade level begin reading readiness by using the names of pupils in the class, the study ends almost immediately after the first two or three lessons, or when the child learns how to recognize the written form of his name. Further development of this type of study is usually prevented by the teacher's lack of onomastic sophistication, not necessarily the fault of the teacher who has not been made aware of the importance of such study.

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The onomastic naivete of these teachers is symptomatic of the failure of philological research and publication in the United States to seek out the relevance of place names to the study of language, history, and geography of our culture. In contrast, name study in Europe has long been linguistically respectable, with Onoma, Beträge zur Namenforschung, Deutsche Namenkunde, and other magazines as publication outlets. The English Place Name Society has published many major studies of English place names. W.G. Hoskins, a cultural historian, says that the volumes issued by the English Place Name Society have "vastly enlarged our understanding and appreciation of the English landscape."[1] He reveals a bit of the poet when he rhapsodizes:

> And I remember deciding in my room one day that a certain 'black spring' recorded in charters from the 1280's onwards must lie in a certain part of a particular field today, and how when I reached this spot I found a spring welling almost imperceptibly out of the ground into a tiny pool, a few inches across, that was jet black even on a sunny afternoon: it was 'the black spring' precisely as the medieval peasant saw it in the thirteenth century when he knelt down to drink from it on a sweaty afternoon.[2]

But the significance of place name research goes beyond the sensual pleasure of discovery. The establishment of a line of place names can alter historical interpretation.

In his The Concise Oxford Dictionary of English Place-Names, Eilert Ekwall summarizes the values of place name study. Although he treats place names in England only, his summary is applicable to other countries as well. After noting that the study of place names offer much of interest to the people of a country, Professor Ekwall comments that place names "form a part of the

vocabulary and deserve as much attention as other words." In addition, they "embody important material for history . . . . give information on early institutions, social conditions, and literature . . . . give important information on antiquities," and "are of great value for linguistic study."[3] And he could have added that until rigorous, scientific study of place names took place, "more nonsense /had/ been written on /them/ than on any subject except, perhaps, that of surnames." [4]

Fortunately, on this side of the Atlantic, too, rigorous, scientific study of place names is making modest beginnings. Onomastic research and the dissemination of the results of that research have progressed in the United States since the American Name Society was incorporated in 1951, and Names, the journal of the Society, began publication in 1953. Plans to make a place name survey of the United States have been formulated and are now beyond the initial stage. The coming of age of onomastic study here should create a more receptive attitude toward names and their importance, whether personal, place, or other. A moment's reflection is sufficient to call our attention to the existence of several billion personal names in the world and to possibly a billion place names, a wealth of language material that has barely been tapped.

Despite the fact that publication in onomastics in the United States is not large in comparison with the amount of material available, research workers are not gesticulating in a vacuum. Collecting and editing centers are being established, and regional magazines are making appearances, sometimes at the expense of the editor, who still has to persuade his colleagues that his work "contributes to humanistic study." There is, however, a substantial body of monographs and articles that treat the etymology, origin, meaning, and application of all categories of names. This excellent material has furthered the scholarly work in names, but it has not as yet reached general distribution among teachers

in the classrooms. Moreover, there has been a lack of studies in the theory of names and a lack of a method of approach. Probably, the best theoretical study in both the United States and Europe is Ernst Pulgram's Theory of Names. In this study, Professor Pulgram compiles and annotates much of the traditional source material on name theory; he, furthermore, discusses the universality of naming, the act of naming, and other matters of a linguistic nature.

One linguistic problem that has faced onomastic theorists has been the definition of a proper name, a place, and a place name. In his monograph, Pulgram provides a partial solution by formulating the definition for proper names:

> A proper name is a noun used κατ' ἐξοχήν in a non-universal function, with or without recognizable current lexical value, of which the potential meaning coincides with and never exceeds its actual meaning, and which is attached as a label to one animate being or one inanimate object (or to more than one in the case of collective names) for the purpose of specific distinction from among a number of like or in some respects similar beings or objects that are either in no manner distinguished from one another or, for our interest, not sufficiently distinguished.[6]

Highly theoretical, this still seems to cover the essential points necessary for a definitive definition for proper names.[7]

Definitive answers to the remaining aspects of this problem have not been so happily effected. However, in light of Pulgram's statement, the definition of place by A.J. Wraight, who is involved in the pragmatic work of the field study of place, may prove serviceable:

> Place . . . is a common term and can refer to anything from a building to an entire country. Here, as in most cases, it applies to a part of

> the earth's surface arbitrarily delimited by an investigation. It may be a whole state, it may be a mining region, or it may be a tract of land comprising a real estate subdivision. Whatever it is, it is down to earth. It is not some elusive fantasy. It is real. It can be seen, traversed and measured. [8]

It should follow that a place name, then, is the linguistic designation of a delimited area that "can be seen, traversed and measured." The definition is workable, but it needs refining. We need to have a category for names of fictional lands that have places that have names. Furthermore, we are already place naming on the moon and other points in space, areas that, so far as is known, have not been traversed, nor are they "down to earth."

But if we have reached the point in space research at which the definition of place must be revised to include the moon and other areas, and if we have reached the point in onomastic research at which the general conception of linguistics must be revised to include onomastics, then we have also reached the point at which our conception of the teaching of English must be revised to include the research and learning possibilities offered by place name study. Moon names and other space names will undoubtedly be added to the body of place names which constitutes an excellent means of introducing students to language study as well as to a diversity of other areas relevant to names.

What, then, are some directions that the study of place names can take in the classroom? Perhaps the most appropriate place to begin is on the college level. There is no formal instruction in place name study in the United States, although there have been many excellent theses written, notably by students of Margaret Bryant of Brooklyn College and T.M. Pearce of the University of New Mexico. In addition, a moderate number of theses have been written under the direction of others interested in onomastics, but these have tangential to linguistics or to some kind of philological study. They have not been purely

and simply place name studies. Each summer someone suggests that a course in onomastics be offered at the Summer Linguistics Institute. So far, the course has not been placed in the curriculum.

In 1964, I began an experiment with a questionnaire form labelled "New York Place Name Survey." The form had space for such items as name, location, county, date of earliest permanent settlement, date of establishment of the town and of the post office, the other names of the town, printed sources, names of informants, the name and address of the compiler, and the date when the information was gathered. Distributed to freshmen who had not been introduced to research methods, the forms proved to be valuable pedagogically in that students were immediately made aware of the need for careful observation, documentation, and research. I regret to say, however, that this did not materially contribute to a New York place name survey.

Later, some of the students were required to take at least one formal course in English linguistics. From these, a few serious place name papers were received. The students also began to refine the questionnaire so that the recorded material could be programmed for storage and printing out by a computer. One history major, Thomas Perrin, revised the form specifically for a survey of St. Lawrence County, New York, place names. Completion of the questionnaire and its coordination with computer requirements made possible the establishment of a formal course in onomastic theory on an independent study basis.

During the summer of 1967, the independent study course was initiated, with the result that approximately 2000 place names (taken from maps ranging from 1792 to the latest geological survey maps) were recorded and documented for St. Lawrence County. Printed sources, other than maps, were ignored at this primary level. In this survey, several disciplines were involved: geography, cartography, linguistics, languages (Indian, French, English), sociology, and anthropology. It was a unique study experience in which original research was successfully performed on an undergraduate level. The student who directed the work has suddenly become a lecturer in demand by local civic groups and women's clubs, an unavoidable, maybe essential, by-product of scholarly research. The experiment on the college level has certainly been rewarding to the students; its success will, I hope, lead within another year to formal classroom instruction in name study at State University College, Potsdam, New York.

At the secondary school level, instruction in place name study is virtually non-existent. One or two schools in New York City have considered, and may now have implemented, the utilization of information contained in a dictionary of local place names as a means of introducing students to the history of their community.[9] In a survey of the schools in Northern New York, not one had so much as thought of the possibility of using the study of place names to stimulate the students' interest in geography, history, or community surroundings. Once the possibilities were pointed out, teachers immediately wanted more information.

Unfortunately, except for local historians' information, which is usually erroneous, a teacher can find little resource material, unless he happens to have a bit of the scholar in him and enough time and money to visit a college library. But some of the material is as near as is the nearest good

dictionary. He could begin, for instance, with New York, a name that can evoke many social images for students, including the decline and fall of the Yankees, the discussions in the United Nations General Assembly meetings, the problems of the megapolis, or hundreds of others. To the especially perceptive teacher, the name can also serve to show how language changes, how Eboracum became York, how York became New York, by way of New Amsterdam, or how the name became important in historical and political contexts. Because of their immediacy, it should take little effort on the part of the teacher to motivate a student to investigate place names. Moreover, as Clarence L. Barnhart says, "The study of the names of the place where a student lives calls for a modest amount of effort which almost any pupil is capable of exerting."[10]

Further, the returns in research training are great. For instance, besides such two-headed calves as those pointed out in the first paragraph above, a name like Norfolk, in New York State, can lead to several possibilities to be considered by the student. The origin of the name is still in debate. First, the pronunciation is /narfark/, which has led surmisers to postulate that the name is derived from North Fork, a bit of nonsense that can end in one of two ways: a visit to the place to see that it is on the wrong directional branch, or a look at a map to see a plethora of such names as North Fork, North Creek, South Fork, etc. The evidence points to Norfolk, probably from an English Norfolk; local pronunciation, however, has exchanged /l/ and /r/, a not uncommon linguistic occurrence.

Three miles from Norfolk is Norwood, named for the North Wood, according to some bluestocking locals noted more for pretty fictions than for facts. A few minutes to no more than an hour in the village records will show that the intuition granted by the gods is less efficacious than is a careful checking of primary documents. These documents reveal that the place was Potsdam Junction (where the Potsdam train stopped) before it became Norwood.

A Reverend Mr. Chase had been reading a poor novel, Norwood, written by Henry Ward Beecher, the famous but envious brother of Harriet Beecher Stowe, in an attempt to prove that he could write as well as Harriet. It is doubtful that any of us, except perhaps some Stowe specialists, remember Norwood. Reverend Chase, however, thought the book was wonderful and proposed the name Norwood for the village, whose residents rightfully wanted to stop being the "tail of Potsdam." Chase's reasons were that Norwood "was an easy name to write" and "there was no T's to cross or I's to dot and no letter went above or below the line." He persuaded forty-two to vote for Norwood. Potsdam Junction received nineteen votes, Onawa twelve votes, Oakley five votes, and Duck Pond one vote. After learning all this, the intellectually curious student may drift off into the problems of the origin of Onawa, Oakley, and Duck Pond. By that time, he has touched on a propoqgandistic source of the Civil War, the institution of slavery, best sellers, the rather amazing Beecher family, local politics, Indian names, and perhaps some waggish frontier humor. The investigation of almost any other place name would be as revealing, meaningful, and educational to the student. There can hardly be a better way to integrate several disciplines and to make the student aware of the correlation of subject matter.

This correlation, according to Cortland P. Auser, "might be most easily handled at the elementary (K-6) level where close tie-in may be used in all terms between name study and the history and geography study."[11] Room in language arts study can be found for the investigation of place names, as well as other types of names. A child's world is surrounded and expanded by proper names: street names, names of the days, months, school names, city names, and, of course, names of relatives, friends, and enemies. Outside of salesmen and onomasts, probably no other group is so conscious of names as are children. The only inhibiting factor in the

motivation of students at this level may be lack of appreciation of the importance of name study by the classroom teacher. The students are already concerned, and the teacher needs only to be made conscious of the students' cognizance.

The possibilities of name study on all educational levels are limited only by the limits of knowledge. So far as we know, all humans name names. Man is a naming animal, which also means that he is a place naming animal. It is certainly time for us to become aware of this great body of place names that can be exploited so well for educational purposes.

Appended is a short, but highly selective, bibliography of resource materials for the teacher who wishes to explore the research that has been done in the area of name study.

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NOTES:

[1]W.G. Hoskins, Provincial England (London, 1964) p. 217.

[2]Ibid., p. 219.

[3](Oxford, 1960), 4th ed., pp. XXIX - XXXIV

[4]P.H. Reaney, The Origin of English Place Names (London, 1964), p.1.

[5](Berkeley, 1954); first published in Beitrage zur Namenforschung, V, No. 2.

[6]Ibid., p. 49.

[7]An excellent commentary on Pulgram's monograph can be found in Francis Lee Utley, "The Linguistic Component of Onomastics," Names, XI, 145-176, passim.

[8]The Field Study of Place (Washington, D.C., 1954), p.1.

[9]This information was furnished by Richard Haber, who has also aided in the preparation of this paper.

[10]"Proposal for a Syllabus on Place Name Study," prepared by Mr. Barnhart as a working paper (July 7, 1967), p.2.

[11]Ibid., p.3.